

PLEASANT REED HOUSE
(Ohr-O'Keefe Museum)
386 Beach Boulevard (moved from 928 Elmer Street)
Biloxi
Harrison County
Mississippi

HABS MS-273
MS-273

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

ADDENDUM TO:
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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Addendum to PLEASANT REED HOUSE

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- Location: Moved in 2002 from 986 Elmer Street to 386 Beach Boulevard to be part of the Ohr-O'Keefe Museum campus, in Biloxi, Mississippi. Drawings of the house, previously transmitted to the Library of Congress, mistakenly state the house was moved to 306 Beach Boulevard.
- Present Owner/Occupant: The Ohr-O'Keefe Museum.
- Present Use: Gate house for the Ohr-O'Keefe Museum and African-American Art Museum.
- Significance: The Pleasant Reed House was the first dwelling built in the state of Mississippi by a Freed-man.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Date of erection: ca. 1887.
2. Architect: Pleasant Reed designed and built the house with money he earned working in the Biloxi, Mississippi, area.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The house was originally owned by Pleasant Reed and his wife Georgia Harris Reed. Therese Reed, one of their five children, owned the property after their deaths and up until 1978. Therese Reed sold the house to the Delta Sigma Sorority, who owned the property until 2002. In April of 2002, the John L. and James S. Knight foundation provided a grant to move the structure from 928 Elmer Street to the Ohr-O'Keefe Museum campus and to open an African-American Art Museum there.
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: The Pleasant Reed House was built by Reed, who had experience working in carpentry. The land was acquired by a labor agreement with a local land developer, Jacob Elmer, in 1887. Receipts kept by the Reed family indicate the house was under construction prior to the completion of mortgage payments to Elmer. Elmer also sold additional lots on Elmer Street to others with various ethnic backgrounds including Freedmen and recent immigrants.

5. Original plans and construction: The design of the house was limited to two rooms. The front entry was accessed via a front porch, which ran the length of the facade. The eastern wall of the family room housed a double-sided fireplace, which opened to the bedroom on the opposite side. The Pleasant Reed House was an on-going project for the family. Prior to 1910, a hallway and a second bedroom were added to the shotgun section of the house. From the family room, the side hall extended to the rear. The hall allowed access to both the master and secondary bedrooms. A rear porch was the final programmatic piece added to the original incarnation of the Pleasant Reed House. At the time of construction, Elmer Street was referred to as Grand Jack Alley. The street was later renamed in honor of Mr. Jacob Elmer, the developer.

6. Alterations and additions: The “camel-back” section was constructed in 1910. The addition provided a formal kitchen with storage and a second fireplace. A dormitory style bedroom was built for the boys of the Reed family above the kitchen. The stairwell to the second-story bedroom was housed in a foyer with the back door. There has been debate over which section of the Pleasant Reed was first built. A receipt from Gill and Rosell dates to 1896 and cites the purchase of the glass transom window located on the western most facade of the house.

Therese Reed, who inhabited the house the longest, transferred ownership to the Delta Sigma Sorority in 1979. The house was electrified and additions were made to the rear to allow the sorority to use the facility for meetings. A modern kitchen and two restrooms were added to bring the dwelling up to code. The original tin roof was replaced with a wood shingle roof and the house was raised on brick piers to 1'10" above grade. The fireplaces were replaced with larger units at this time.

An additional set of renovations began in 2002 to restore the Pleasant Reed House to its original form. The city of Biloxi is considering further economic development along the Main Street corridor. The new commercial development near Elmer and Main streets has altered the character of the Pleasant Reed House’s surroundings. The Delta Sigma Sorority and the Ohr-O’Keefe Museum have made arrangements to relocate the house on the future site of Frank Gehry’s Ohr-O’Keefe Museum. The Pleasant Reed House will serve as an African-American museum and the gatehouse to the campus-style pottery museum.

The house was divided into three sections and moved one and a half miles to its new location. The “camel back” section and the 1980s additions were not restored at the new site. Termites were found in sections of the structure and the problems addressed prior to relocation. Besides the portions damaged by termites that were replaced, the wood shingle roof also needed replacement due to the growth of ferns which allowed moisture to seep into the house. The roof leak caused near total destruction of the addition below and therefore that section will be removed to maintain the integrity of the remaining

structure. Years of weathering have caused mild to moderate damage to the fascia and wood clapboards.

The rear porch of the Pleasant Reed House will be replicated and replaced to serve as the official entry to the Ohr-O'Keefe Pottery Museum. The house has been air-conditioned and a security system has been installed. In order to retain historic accuracy, lighting will be provided by a series of fiber optic tubes concealed amongst other architectural elements.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: The Pleasant Reed House has a side-hall cottage floor plan which was common in the southern regions of the Mississippi River Valley. The front facade is dressed with German siding and crowned with a hip roof. The additional sides were clad with square vertical clapboards.

2. Condition of fabric: Moderate to poor.

B. Description of Exterior

1. Overall dimensions: 24'0" x 50'11". The house is two stories on the east, and a single story on the west. A covered portico is on the western-most facade.

2. Foundation: The original foundation was only slightly above grade but was raised in the 1980s to a height of 1'10".

3. Walls: The wall systems of the Pleasant Reed House are comprised of 2x4 structural members with vertical siding providing the finished surface. The front facade is clad with German siding and the remaining facades are composed of square vertical clapboards.

4. Structural system, framing: Load bearing walls are used to support the "stick-built" hipped roof.

5. Porches, stoops, balconies, porticoes, bulkheads: An entry porch is located on the west facade of the house. An ornamental turned spool frieze is attached to the cornice boards on the front porch.

6. Chimneys: A double-sided chimney is located between the living room and master bedroom. The mantle on this fireplace is believed to be original. The second fireplace is located on the east wall of the kitchen.

7. Openings

a. Doorways and doors: The front entry door is a three-panel door with transom window over the door. The rear door of the Pleasant Reed House provides access to the back porch from the hallway. The rear door is a flat-panel door with transom window over the frame.

b. Windows and shutters: The windows of the Pleasant Reed House are glazed with six-over-six lights.

8. Roof: The shotgun house is topped with a hipped roof which was originally red painted corrugated metal. The corrugated metal was replaced with split wood shingles during the 1980s renovation.

C. Description of Interior

1. Floor plan: The main entrance to the Pleasant Reed House is located on the west facade via the front porch. The house was divided into three rooms with a hall. The family room is the first room accessed from the front porch. A hall extends from the family room along the south side to the rear exit. Both the master and secondary bedrooms are accessed from the hallway.

2. Stairways: There are no stairwells in the original construction of the house.

3. Flooring: The flooring used in all phases of construction were 1x6 planks. They were unfinished at the time of construction but have since been sealed with a clear sealant.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls and ceiling of the Pleasant Reed House are comprised of the same 1x6 boards used for the flooring. The ceiling and walls of the family room and ceiling of the hall were painted white. These surfaces were originally unfinished.

5. Openings

a. Doorways and doors: The door between the hall and family room is a flat panel door with transom light above the frame. The doors connecting the hall to the bedrooms are comprised of seven vertical boards joined by two horizontal members. Plain architrave boards surround all doors.

b. Windows: The windows of the Pleasant Reed House are glazed with six-over-six lights surrounded by the plain architrave board. The window on the west facade of the family room measures 2'10" x 5'0". All remaining windows measure 2'4" x 3'9".

6. Decorative features: The most notable decorative feature of the Pleasant Reed House is the turned spool frieze on the front porch. Little ornamentation was added to the dwelling.

7. Hardware: Wrought iron rim box locks were used to secure the exterior and interior doors of the Pleasant Reed House.

8. Original furnishings: Several of the original furnishings were still present in the house when the Delta Sigma Sorority acquired the property. The furnishings were moved into secure storage but will be returned to the house as part of the exhibit at the Ohr-O'Keefe Museum. These include a pie safe with screened openings, a pine table with turned legs and drop leaf, an 1880s cottage table with spooled legs, and a 1930s Jenny Lynn manufactured bed.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural drawings: There are HABS drawings on file at the Library of Congress.

B. Early views: There are some photographs dating to 1970. Photographer unknown.

C. Interviews: Dora Faison, September 30, 2003, 409 N. Seventh Street, Baton Rouge, LA.

D. Sources Consulted:

Dodds, James D. and Frank Genzer, Jr. *An Architectural Study of the Pleasant Reed House*. Baton Rouge, 1999.

Guice, Julia Cook. *The Buildings of Biloxi: An Architectural Survey*. Biloxi: 1976. p. 107.

Holmes, Nancy N. *Analysis and Interpretation of Documentary Materials to 928 Elmer Street, Biloxi, Mississippi*. Biloxi, 1980.

Marder, Walter S. *The Condition Assessment of the Pleasant Reed House*. Biloxi, 2001.

United States Department of Interior National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places, Section 7-8, pp. 1-9.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This restoration and move of the Pleasant Reed House could not have been completed if it were not for the donations and hard work of many individuals. The Delta Sigma Sorority donated the

house to the Ohr-O'Keefe Museum and the John L. and James S. Knight Foundation provided a grant for the move. The Mississippi Department of Archives and Historic Renovation and the Ohr-O'Keefe Museum provided funding for the renovation and restoration.